

# Mind of the Locusts

by H.G.Wells

Category: Independence Day

Genre: Fantasy, Sci-Fi

Language: English

Status: Completed

Published: 2016-04-07 23:48:13

Updated: 2016-04-10 11:19:13

Packaged: 2016-04-27 22:11:10

Rating: T

Chapters: 2

Words: 18,583

Publisher: [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

Summary: Following the war of 1996, President Thomas Whitmore is left scarred from his violent contact with the alien hive mind. Yet his brain now contains a treasure trove of shared alien memories - information that could be vital to humanity's survival. The newly formed ESD begins a dangerous experiment to uncover the secrets of the viscous alien hive mind. One shot...for now...

## 1. Chapter 1

**\*\*Mind of the Locusts (I)\*\***

From the shadows of the never-ending gulf of space, they came.

They travelled through the airless void, all together as one in their floating hive. They slept as one mind while they did so, a whole civilisation laid dormant and hibernating.

They were always of one mind. Sleeping together. Dreaming together. Thinking together.

Sharing the same memories. Seeing everything that they all saw, knowing everything they all knew.

One mind. One race. Undivided.

\_Invincible\_.

The great ship that was their home journeyed on through the endless blackness. The only light came from distant stars and nebulae shining in the cosmic panorama. Viewed from afar, it looked like a black, faceless leviathan, a beast spawned from the darkness of space itself.

The destination was always the same. Another world. The next world. Any world - so long as it had food and fuel. The voyage to the next world might take months, years, centuries, even millennia - but it

would be completed. Those aboard the ship would sleep for any length of time before the next world was found.

The hiveship itself was hibernating, like all those on board. All non-essential systems had shut down, resting until the time came again. None of the power and fuel built up at the last feeding ground was to be wasted. Survival depended on that.

Only a few systems that were left functioning during the long journeys between worlds. This included the life-support which kept the whole swarm alive as they slept, the propulsion systems that kept them moving on through space and, most important of all, the navigator.

The navigator was a semi-organic mind, a living computer fused to the heart of the ship. It too was part of the great mind of all who lived aboard. It was also the only one of that mind currently awake.

The navigator had been created by its masters to direct their ship for them while they slept. It kept the hive moving on its endless journey, ensuring that there would be enough power to keep ship and swarm alive throughout the voyage. With due diligence it kept the shields up, protecting the swarm from micro-meteoroids as well as the lethal effects of radiation and cosmic rays, also using the automated defence systems to burn away the odd rogue asteroid or comet in the ship's path.

Most importantly, it would keep an eye out for new food.

The ship had sensor and scanning systems powerful beyond imagining - enough to sense a ripe new planet many light years away. The navigator kept the homeship on a path to a potential new feeding ground, ensuring the journeys between were as short as possible. Scout ships were dispatched ahead, their pilots awoken before the rest of the hive, in order to locate and probe a suitable world.

Their findings would be diligently reported; the scouts would have made a thorough scan of the planet in full, testing the thickness and suitability of the meat on the new morsel. Once the results read positive, the great ship would draw closer.

When the ship finally got close enough to the new planet in the swarm's path, a signal would be sent throughout the great mind.

Then the swarm would wake.

Billions of lights would turn on, bringing the interior to life. Billions of eyes would open, ready for life once more.

The swarm would emerge from its slumber. The single, terrible mind which all of its members formed would be filled with the readings of the new world. Of the life that filled it.

Then the hunger would come. That crushing hunger, that drove them ever on to new conquests, to new plunder.

A hunger that would never end, that would never be satisfied, that had consumed so many stars in its wake.

They had been asleep for so long. Perhaps Eons. After all that time they had awoken famished, warriors hungry and ready to do battle once more for new food.

This planet was filled with life-giving water. Surrounded by clean, refreshing air. Powered by the rich energy of a burning, shining star. Teeming with life waiting to be processed into abundant food. Heated from within by a raging core of magma and molten metal - all just waiting to be sucked out like a vampire would drain blood from its victim.

The swarm needed all of this, and it needed it now.

The natives of this world were primitive. Insignificant. Barely out of their lush cradle of a world. They would resist, of course. But they would fail. As so many others, on so many other worlds, had resisted the swarm before and failed. To resist the swarm meant only destruction.

The natives were nothing but vermin. Obstacles to food and power, which rightfully belonged to a superior race. Mere pests that infested the new fields of harvest, waiting to be exterminated.

The swarm was numberless, united and advanced beyond their feeble comprehension. So many worlds had fallen to them, so many worlds and species consumed. The native vermin would not survive.

The main systems of their mothership powered up, readying it for the latest in the long line of countless wars the swarm had waged across the stars. Within the planetoid-sized interior, ships were readied, weapons prepared, warriors marshalled.

They would descend upon this world. Cities of vermin would burn, primitive armies would be shattered. This world would be settled, harvested like so many others before it.

Then, after many years, all this world had to offer would be gone. The swarm would move on. The Earth would be left a lifeless husk - a barren, airless rock, with only the ashes and bones of its former inhabitants covering the lifeless surface.

Flashing forward in time, he strode upon this surface now. Seeing all life drained from it. Seeing the shattered ruins left in the invaders' wake. Seeing all around him the bones of his race, wiped out and consumed like so many others before them.

There was nothing here, in this lifeless hellscape of death. It was almost like the surface of the moon - the only difference was knowing this had once been a bountiful world, full of promise. Happening upon a pile of shrivelled corpses, he was drawn to a single one among them.

The corpse was emaciated, drained of all fluids and shrivelled, as if the invaders had sucked out all it could offer the same way they had done with the whole planet. Perhaps they fed on the humans themselves as well as the Earth.

Yet in spite of all, the face on the corpse was still recognisable. He screamed with horror and despair the moment he saw it.

It was the face of his lost wife.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>February 21st, 2001<strong>

\*\*US Airspace, en route to Area 51\*\*

Thomas Whitmore woke up that instant, his body covered in sweat. Nearly five years now, and he still wasn't able to exorcise his recurring nightmares. He likely never would.

"God damn it..."

Whitmore ran a hand through his sticky hair, cleaning his soaked forehead as he did so. He was back in the real world now - he'd escaped the nightmare. But the escape was only temporary, and he knew it. The dreams would return the next time he slept, as they always did.

He slowly reached for a glass of water close to his bed, secured in a cup-holder but still slightly vibrating with the turbulence outside. Simultaneously, he swung his legs to his right and sat up on the side of the bed, breathing heavily.

The tormented man took a large sip of the cool water, sending it down his throat with a glug. He felt the drink cool his body as he returned to caressing his aching lobes. However much he tried, he couldn't banish the images he had seen in his sleep moments ago. Feeling those memories while awake was just as bad as living them in a dream.

Whitmore had so many painful memories from the events of '96, so many ghosts that he wished to stay away but knew would always return. Cities of slaughtered innocents that he kept telling himself he should have evacuated, always cursing himself for his indecision that fateful July 2nd. Those young pilots he'd fought alongside, who had fallen in defence of their planet. The wounded face of his daughter, her innocence forever shattered along with that of the rest of humanity.

Then the tearful face of his dying wife, Marilyn Whitmore.

Thomas was grateful that he had been reunited with her before the end - another debt to one Colonel Steven Hiller that he would never be able to repay. But she had died in his arms - and he, who people always believed to be the most powerful man in the world, had been unable to save her...the pain from seeing her face in his mind was unbearable.

There was one other face, though, that rivalled the face of his lost wife. One he saw in his dreams far more. This face did not stir sorrow or anguish in him. Only revulsion and fear, an overpowering anger combined into a burning hatred that would never die; for that face and everything it's kind had done to him, to people all over the world.

It was the face that had personally given him these damned nightmares, this mental hell he was forced to journey through for the rest of his life. The face of the alien pilot who had tried to escape

Area 51, who Hiller had shot down and taken prisoner that July 3rd. The dark, soulless eyes of the monster who had telepathically raped his mind, filling it with these images that plagued Whitmore to this day...those eyes would appear at the beginning of every one of his nightmares.

The eyes would then suddenly light up - Whitmore would see them as clear as light of day - and then he would hear Dr. Okun's possessed voice echoing once more, before the images he'd received from the mind-rape came again.

\_"No peace...die...die..."\_

Whitmore guessed it was a small introduction from the author of those visions. A telepathic implant, a reminder that the aliens had not taken Earth, but they had left Whitmore, his people and the whole planet permanently scarred. Not even the President of the United States came out unscathed. They would be in his mind forever, an invasion just as brutal as their attack on the planet.

\_Guess they won there\_, Whitmore thought bitterly. \_They lost Earth - but my brain's the consolation.\_

The aircraft shook with the turbulence once more, forcing Whitmore from his thoughts. He couldn't have been more grateful, and felt even better when the bedside phone rang.

\_Anything to distract me. Get me the hell out of my head...\_

He picked up the phone.

"Hello?"

"Good morning Mr President. We're approaching Area 51 now."

Whitmore took the news from his secret service bodyguard calmly. It was good to know they were close to landing; the former Marine pilot and commander-in-chief had developed a phobia of flying as a passenger, ever since the narrow escape from Andrews Air Force Base during the aliens' first attack, another unwelcome scar from the invasion.

Yet the announcement did little to ease the sense of dread of what he would have to face soon after landing. An ordeal that only now, a month after ending his term of office, he had agreed to undertake.

"Thank you George. I'll be right down."

He then put the phone back in the holster, sighing and caressing his head once more. Almost everyone had begged him not to go through with this. It had been out of the question when he was still in the oval office, in those uncertain years after the aliens' defeat. The nation needed its commander-in-chief intact - it didn't help that at the time he had already been suffering the after-effects of the violent mental contact with the downed alien.

Now that he had left the White House, Whitmore was free to go through with the process that faced him at his destination. Yet still he had been urged against doing so. General William Grey - now the serving

President - ever-loyal and concerned for his old friend's safety, had practically begged his predecessor to walk away from it.

"We still don't understand what happened in that lab - what in the hell it was they did to you!" Grey's face had been torn with emotion - something Whitmore would never have imagined with the iron-clad general. "You don't know what might \_happen\_!"

Thomas smiled at the thought of Grey. Tough as nails, no-nonsense, loyal to a fault - that was the General William Grey he knew and loved. During the Gulf War, Grey had been one of Whitmore's high-ranking superiors - it had been something of a leap to have him as a subordinate in the White House. But he had adapted to the change with a dedication that was nothing short of admirable. When the aliens arrived and began their attack, he had been a stable and reliable presence by the president's side. Whitmore knew that he couldn't have lasted those days without him, and could never repay him for his efforts.

Though the former head of US Space Command had been a key figure during the War of 1996, he also played an even larger role in the post-war administration and reconstruction. He'd helped to co-ordinate the rebuilding efforts not just in the United States, but throughout the world. The Grey Plan had stimulated this endeavour, ensuring America did its part in building the new world that would follow the near-extinction of the human race.

Already Grey was being praised by commentators across the world as the present generation's George Marshall or Dwight D. Eisenhower. Now he was at the helm of the nation, with Thomas knowing he couldn't have left his office in more capable hands.

Which made going against his advice all the more painful. Thomas had convinced the newly elected President Grey - firmly against the latter's better judgement - to permit his journey to Area 51, along with his participation in this latest project of the burgeoning Earth Space Defense program.

Whitmore had put all of his diplomatic effort after the war to unite every government in the world. He had fought to ensure that the ESD became a reality. For that reason he was fully committed to the continuation of their research, for there lay the keys to humanity's survival.

Now, he was about to do more than secure them another huge slice of public funding. For this project, he was ready to risk his own life.

The plane touched down with a bump. Within a few seconds of landing, Whitmore emerged from his berth, fully dressed. He gazed down at the first pair of eyes that greeted him.

"We're here daddy."

Patricia, his only child. Now eleven years old - yet Thomas could tell that the events surrounding the loss of her mother had forced her into growing up lightning fast and far beyond her years, reaching an unnatural level of maturity. Now that he was officially retired he almost felt like his little girl had become the grown-up woman in his life, the personal carer that kept him out of trouble.

Not even she had been able to talk him out of this. But he hadn't been able to talk her out of being here to support him, to stand by his side.

"Thanks munchkin."

Even as she grew, Thomas knew he would never throw that nickname away. Patricia didn't mind - but her face was still filled with heartfelt worry.

"Dad, you know you don't have to do this. It's not too late to pull out."

He looked down at her, trying to put on a brave face. His daughter had lost so much at six-years old. Now there was a chance she would lose everything she had left.

"This is something I have to do, honey. I'll be fine. Don't worry."

She stepped forward, her hand grasping his own. Though it was much smaller, her grip felt like iron. Her glazing, watery blue eyes gazed deep into his.

"Promise me that."

By the time Thomas could bring himself to respond, his voice was so strained to a whisper that he could barely hear himself.

"I promise, munchkin." He couldn't fathom any other response to give.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Area 51, Nevada, United States of America<strong>

ESD Director David Levinson watched the VIP jet touch down on the obscure runway of the Groom Lake Weapons Testing Facility, better known as Area 51. Major Sanchez, Mitchell's successor following the latter's promotion, stood ram-rod straight by his side, together with a honour guard of soldiers. But even his military mask couldn't hide the anxiety everyone on base felt about the upcoming experiment.

The former president's jet didn't waste time in taxiing into a parking position. Within moments, a gangway was prepared and the cabin door opened.

The Whitmores, both the former president and his eleven-year old daughter, sallied forth. The latter stuck to her father like a second shadow, keeping his hand in a firm grip as she lead the ex-POTUS down the steps. David could only imagine what she would become once she reached adulthood.

Former President Thomas Whitmore had left office just last month - yet the strain of his term in power clearly manifested itself to a point where he was steadily becoming physically unrecognisable.

David still remembered the sight of the cocky-looking young senator

he'd brawled with after catching him with Connie one fateful afternoon, the photos of the poster-boy fighter pilot from the Gulf War, the idealistic young politician in all those speeches, debates and campaign ads. The youngest commander-in-chief since John F. Kennedy, Whitmore had certainly looked the part in the first year of his presidency.

But the horror of the invasion, along with the strain of running a devastated country and helping to rebuild a devastated world, had visibly taken a heavy toll on him.

David could see that blotches of Whitmore's once finely combed, slick dark hair was now much less ordered, with streaks of it turned to silvery grey. His once smooth, immaculate forehead was now wrinkled with several crease lines. Salt and pepper-coloured stubble was forming across his chin. His eyes were now old and tired, sunken into their sockets and ringed with dark circles, almost permanently bloodshot. He moved slowly and cautiously, as if he were already two decades older.

All this, and the man was still only in his late forties. Add to that having his mind violated by a hostile alien intelligence - not for the first time, David did not envy him.

He still tried to look the part of a strong politician, decked out in his smart suit and tie. But David knew he was looking at a man who had suffered heavily.

The Whitmores strode down the gangway stairs, crossing the tarmac to where Levinson and the soldiers waited. David adjusted his glasses in a final effort to make himself as presentable as possible. Fortunately, Whitmore was in an informal mood.

"Good to see you again David," he greeted, shaking the ESD Director's hand. "You seem to go from strength to strength each time we meet."

However often David tried, he could find little, if any relation to his life before the invasion and after. Before, he'd been - in Connie's own words - 'chronically unambitious', a high-scoring MIT graduate content to live as a humble cable repairman. He'd been getting good pay from a low-profile job, and even the fact he'd almost lost a marriage over that decision hadn't bothered him. He didn't see how helpful he could be in a place higher than Compact Cable.

Then the invasion had come.

Like the whole human race, David had been brutally forced into change. At Whitmore's insistence, he had been crowned the first director of the Earth Space Defense program. It was probably the biggest career jump in history, but he'd accepted it with no second thoughts. "Now he gets ambitious", Connie had said. But it wasn't personal ambition that drove him now - it was the desire to make the full use of his knowledge and ability to ensure the planet and humanity had a chance of survival in the future.

Humanity needed to be able to meet the second challenge from the invaders, when it inevitably came. After so many years of drifting, sitting around and chasing his tail - years he now knew he'd wasted -

David was committed to making a difference from a high place. As ESD director, he was beginning to understand how Thomas must have felt.

"Thank you Mr President. We're glad to see you too."

After the invasion's dramatic climax, David's respect for the president had steadily increased in the years that followed. Before, he hadn't understood Connie's belief in the young POTUS. As far as he had been concerned at the time, Whitmore was just another politician - a charming man who promised but never delivered, who preached but never listened.

As a humble member of Compact Cable, David had never put much faith in politicians. He'd never voted at all, never mind for Whitmore. Maybe that was one reason why he didn't want to rise to any high places - he didn't want to end up anywhere close to politics, another sore point with Connie. It also hadn't helped that David had seen Whitmore as being partly responsible for that coming divorce. During the worst of the invasion, he seemed like someone who cracked under pressure.

Then came July 4th, and David found himself being forced to change his opinion. The president had gone with his plan in the face of objections from the Secretary of Defence and long odds - a decision he still couldn't thank him enough for. The alternative had been to wait until the aliens landed and started colonising the planet for harvest - at which point the plan was to ambush the settling aliens with nuclear weapons.

Such a strategy might well have worked - but it would have left the planet poisoned and the human race dead along with the invaders. Whitmore's decision to go with a higher-risk plan had saved the planet, both from the aliens and human desperation. On top of that, he'd lead the defence himself. That proved to David that without a doubt, Whitmore was no ordinary politician. He was glad, as ESD director, to assist the president in the post-war effort.

He respected Whitmore's latest decision just as much. But still, the danger was beyond question.

"It's still not too late to back out," he whispered conspiratorially.

"Not happening," Whitmore's reply was filled with iron certainty. "Let's get to it. It's the only way to find out exactly what they know."

This was somewhat true - most of the alien databases were still indecipherable, many having being automatically purged in the final moments of their masters' defeat. Whitmore's brain held the largest amount of accessible knowledge on the invaders known to humanity - through that telepathic link the aliens' simple, terrible purpose of stripping worlds of all life and resources had been discovered.

Now Levinson and the rest of the ESD scientific leadership wanted to know more. The proposal for what Whitmore was now about to undertake had been made a few months after the War of '96 - but had been rejected because he had still be an office and the post-war government wanted to avoid any destabilisation caused by the

president's health.

Since Whitmore had left office, that risk was removed. But the risk to his mental state, perhaps even his life, still remained. But David knew he would not be deterred.

"Right this way."

Escorted by Major Sanchez, the two men made their way into the bowels of Area 51. Patricia followed, clasping her father's hand as they proceeded together.

No matter how many times he visited this place, Whitmore was always amazed by the contrast between the few scattered, dusty, non-descript buildings on the surface to the vast corridors and lab spaces that lay below. After taking the elevator down, they strode through the same clean room he'd barged into five years ago.

They didn't go the hangar this time - the alien attacker had been salvaged following Hiller and Levinson's escape from the mothership and crash-landing in the Nevada desert, but Whitmore had seen what was left of it dozens of times. It was no longer the showpiece of Area 51's collection, anyway - it had since been joined by countless other alien artefacts and debris.

There was also a darker secret - one that the ESD had been keen to restrict to rumour in the public domain. On the lower levels, in high-security vaults, there were live alien prisoners under heavy guard and surveillance. It was just one more reason for the increased military presence here. Despite hoping he'd make sure there would be no more secrets, Whitmore had ended up hiding the truth as previous governments had.

He would be kept well away from the alien prison vaults - there were too many uncertainties about how deep the telepathic link went. Even so, the aliens would be heavily monitored for possible side-effects while the president underwent the coming procedure. Gaining an observation of their behaviour was decided to be worth the risk of carrying out this experiment here.

The party preceded through a narrow corridor that branched away from the hangar, until they finally came to a secure door near the end of the passage. David gestured to it with an inviting hand.

"She's waiting, sir. No turning back now."

Whitmore nodded.

"I take it you'll be watching?"

"In the next room, through a two-way mirror. This is as secure as it gets - the ones we captured were interrogated here before we built the holding cells downstairs. If I see anything I don't like in there..."

"I'm seeing this through, Director Levinson," the president replied, his tone formal enough to make clear he would not be deterred, "whatever it takes."

The ESD director nodded, before pushing his key card into the lock

and opening the door. Thomas turned to look back at his daughter, who was now looking increasingly distraught.

"Stay in the next room Pat."

"Dad..."

"I'll be fine. David will be there. He'll take care of you. I trust this doctor he's hired - it'll be just like another check-up."

He clapped his daughter on the shoulder, smiling as confidently as he could. She could only offer a small smile in return - but Thomas looked into her eyes and knew her thoughts were different, same as his.

David opened the door, allowing the former POTUS to enter. The room was bare save for the two-way mirror on one wall, a table and two chairs. A typical interrogation room.

In one chair sat a primly dressed woman with dark blonde hair tied back, notebook at the ready. A medical officer was also present, tending to a brainwave monitor the president would be hooked up to during this session. All other medical monitoring and recording equipment was set up in the room on the other side of the two-way mirror. Aside from the medic, the president and the woman would be alone during this interview.

"Mr President, this is Dr. Irene Saunders, mental health expert and qualified hypnotherapist. She'll be taking your case."

Whitmore directed his gaze to the attentive psychiatrist.

"You've done this before, I take it?"

"With a number of pre-war abductees who survived '96. It was only after all that I started to take their stories seriously."

"I just hope you know what it is you're getting into."

"I read Dr. Wells' file, sir - and yours. I know what to expect."

Dr. Immanuel Wells, the original head of the Area 51 research programme and Okun's most prominent predecessor, had been present at the internment of the recovered attacker and its occupants following the Roswell crash of 1947. Like Whitmore, he had also made a telepathic link with the alien hive mind, through the sole survivor of that crash.

The link had been severed following that survivor's death - but Wells retained the memories and recorded them in detail in Area 51's files. They now served as a crucial piece of evidence.

In contrast to the violence of Whitmore's experience, the creature Dr. Wells interacted with had posed as a harmless and peaceful being, filling his head with soft and calming thoughts. A similar experience had been described by pre-invasion abductees - the aliens had not worn their fearsome bio-armour, had harmed no-one and gave every indication to their test subjects that they were a peaceful species.

Wells, however, had come to a different conclusion decades before the invasion of '96.

During the mental exchanges, he claimed to have seen a planet the aliens had previously visited - possibly, he speculated, the one where they had obtained the species which they used for their bio-mechanical suits. He had seen visions of that initially lush jungle world becoming a barren wasteland, to the point that the creatures were hollowing out the core for metals and feeding off the mosses and lichens that grew beneath the surface.

The Roswell alien claimed to be showing Wells their homeworld - that his people were refugees from a lost world and that he was a simple scientist, like his human 'friend'. But Wells surmised that the once jungle-like environment of the planet he saw would have better supported the species used as an exoskeleton, with its strong limbs and grappling tentacles, rather than the fragile masters within. The alien survivor had insisted that his people came from this planet - but Wells soon worked out that did not mean he was being shown the visitors' homeworld. His suspicions were further raised by the fact that the alien hadn't indicated how the planet was reduced to a barren state.

The visitors, he concluded, were conquerors - they'd plundered that world for all it had been worth until the environment had been ruined beyond recognition. They used the looted resources to feed themselves and grow, to manufacture new tools, ships and weapons for future conquests; the bio-mechanical suit was just one of these.

Then, they would move on to the next world. Earth.

In the decades that followed, Wells had strongly argued that the aliens were hostile. In meeting after meeting at Project Smudge, the main government program surrounding alien phenomena, he had stressed that an invasion was imminent and military preparations had to be made as soon as possible. He even advocated breaking the story to the public, if necessary. His concerns became stronger as it became apparent that most genuine UFO sightings took place over military or other vital installations. The Roswell craft was clearly part of a larger reconnaissance picket, a vanguard tasked with scouting ahead of the main force.

Wells was predictably met with opposition. Most officials who were part of Smudge dismissed his views as alarmist, and the few who agreed with him still preferred to keep the aliens' existence under wraps. Furthermore, in the decades after his telepathic experience Wells' health had suffered heavily. He had been diagnosed - as Whitmore had been - with a form of PTSD. It was easy to dismiss his ideas as the ramblings of a lunatic.

Wells' direct style in comparison to many of his peers at Smudge, along with his increasingly erratic behaviour, fiery rhetoric and radical beliefs steadily alienated him from that committee. Soon enough, they saw him as a potential threat to the secrecy of the project.

This was enough for one Albert Nimziki - then Deputy Director of the CIA - to force his resignation and disappearance in the early 70s. Wells was officially marked as deceased while confined to a mental

institution, where he died some time after.

Whitmore had read the file on Dr. Wells, had heard of his own visions and trauma. He could certainly empathise easily - but it must have been even worse for that man, to know the terrible truth and not be able to speak it out loud. When he could speak it behind closed doors, no-one wished to hear or believe. The man who had seen it coming had been completely dismissed. His already low opinion of Nimziki became even lower when he read of the circumstances of the 'resignation' of Dr. Wells.

Whitmore took himself out of his inner thoughts to look the psychiatrist in the eye.

"You might not like what's in my head. It's hell every time I see it."

He winced as he remembered the roughly five-second mental download from the alien's mind. It had felt like his nerves were on fire, that his cranium would explode. But what he had seen had helped the human race know their enemy well.

Dr. Saunders nodded.

"I knew what they are as much as everyone else, sir. My husband and parents are dead because of them." She sniffed, briefly turning her gaze to the floor. "My daughter is all I have left, now."

Whitmore frowned. Almost every living human had lost someone to the invaders. He'd met so many people like this - people who reminded him that he was not alone in his losses, who reminded him not to withdraw into self-pity.

That was what gave him the resolve to continue.

"Let's get to it."

Dr. Saunders sat him down and took her position on the opposite side of the table. The ESD M.D. didn't waste time in hooking the former president up to the brainwave monitor. The session was ready to begin.

Once again, Thomas Whitmore steeled himself for what was to come.

\* \* \*

><p>David watched through the two-way mirror in the monitoring room as the session began. Dr. Isaacs, once Okun's faithful deputy and now Director of Research at Area 51 since his predecessor entered a deep coma, stood to his right. Isaacs had his eyes fixed on the monitors that informed the monitoring team inside this adjoining room of Whitmore's vital signs; heart-rate, blood pressure, nerves and most importantly, brainwave activity.<p>

Not only did they hope to keep them alive, they also hoped to gain some insight into the nature of the alien hive mind - along with whatever secrets Whitmore's mind rape may have given away to humanity. It was hoped, through hypnotherapy provided by Dr. Saunders, that Whitmore would be able to recover additional memories from the mental link that was believed to still be active.

What was on a couple of other screens gave David goosebumps. These screens were linked to security cameras in the alien holding cells. The inmates were also being heavily monitored - their reactions to this interview, if any, would be clearly recorded, along with any change in their vital signs. If they were affected by this session, David and his team would know instantly.

Worse, David knew there was a chance if the imprisoned aliens would sense what was going on in here, they might try to stop it. If the readings indicated any telepathic interference on their part in this session, he'd pull the plug.

David felt Patricia shuffle nervously behind him. It clearly distressed her, seeing her father hooked up to all those chords and wires. It was taking all of her willpower to allow this to go ahead, and David admired her for it.

Hypnotherapy was always a controversial medication. The effect it could leave on the patient's medical well-being was always unpredictable, and in some cases it could leave lasting damage. David didn't pretend to understand hypnosis in full - he certainly didn't understand the procedures that Dr. Saunders was undertaking that very moment.

Nevertheless, he did know that hypnosis was instrumental in recovering lost memories - or in this case, memories that were not known in detail. Memories that had been rapidly implanted by a hostile intelligence, compressed like zipped computer files in a high-speed download.

It was hoped that hypnosis would open those files, make them viewable - that the president would be able to see all the memories the alien had shared with him in full.

It was a tried and tested procedure. Subjects of alien abductions, who had their memories wiped after their experiences, were able to recall the events of their ordeals in full while undergoing hypnosis. The Betty and Barney Hill case came to mind, as did that of Arizona logger Travis Walton, along with so many others. However, these patients went through considerable mental agony during their sessions - the nature of Whitmore's case would make it even more painful.

But David trusted Dr. Saunders to carry the procedure through safely. He could see that she was taking it slow, gradually inducing Whitmore into a relaxed, hypnotic state. He could hear her soft voice through the speakers, speaking her lines and asking questions as cautiously as she could, slowly securing her subject with what looked to be a well-practiced procedure.

Then she began the questioning.

"Part of your mind is behind a closed door. We're going to open that door - slowly, crack by crack...I want you to tell me what you see..."

Whitmore mumbled something in response - something that didn't register on the speakers.

"Now...what was the first thing you saw on July 3rd, at 3:30

pm?"

Whitmore spoke, his voice steady, eyes closed. He recounted, word for word, his entrance into the vault with the preserved alien bodies. The containment lab on the other side of the glass, obscured by sparks and smoke. Mitchell calling for Dr. Okun in vain over the intercom.

Then, with a start, he recalled Okun's body being slammed against the glass. The terror he'd felt in that split-second. The appearance of the alien, alive and conscious. It's demands for release. His attempt at negotiation, rebuffed.

Then the mental contact had begun.

"What was the first thought you had?"

Whitmore hesitated. Then he tensed up, becoming straight as a board in a millisecond.

\* \* \*

><p>Disgust. Hatred. Contempt. Loathing.<p>

He felt it bombarding his mind like a sledgehammer, every toxic thought he received desiring his death. Those black eyes lit up with malevolence, filling his mind with the poison.

\_"Die...Die..."\_

He was a member of a lesser species - little more than animals. Insects, of no value whatsoever. Insignificant beyond their own pathetic comprehension.

There would be no mercy for such worthless vermin - his kind were filthy little things that needed to be exterminated. They contaminated this resourceful world like bacteria, ruining what the swarm needed.

There was no other action to take other than to wipe them all out. It was disgusting to even commune with this primitive mind.

Humanity would be burned away, city by city, like the filth they were...

\* \* \*

><p>Whitmore immediately cried out, recoiling from those very first thoughts he'd received from the alien pilot. Even today, they caused his mind to burn with pain with their venom. He nearly burst out of the chair, before he was restrained, steadied and slowly calmed by the medical aide.<p>

It took some time before he was calmed enough to speak again. He moaned out the answer to Saunders' question, giving voice to the overwhelming viciousness and malevolence he'd felt from the creature that day.

He gave voice to his thoughts, becoming more delirious with each word, speaking over the doctor's attempts to calm him.

"We're nothing to them...nothing...insignificant...we're in their way...no mercy...we're nothing to them...vermin...disgusting...pests...maggots...flies on their food...germs...they want us all dead...we all need to die..."

"Why?"

"We're in their way...they want this planet, like all the others...we're next..."

"So there were ones before?"

Whitmore managed to bring himself under control. He seemed to pull himself through the malevolence that accompanied his telepathic link, like a swimmer struggling from deep water to the surface for air in a storm-racked sea. Finally, he broke through it all, and strained out two words.

"Many...worlds."

At that moment, Dr. Saunders straightened at Director Levinson's voice in her earpiece.

"We're not hearing anything we haven't heard already. Try to change tack - ask about those other planets. He's only touched on those before - let's hear more about them."

The Director sounded so calm, so matter-of-fact. Irene Saunders knew she should probably have expected that, from one of the two men who'd infiltrated the alien mothership in one of the alien fighter craft alone. Yet she could sense his deep concern, and could only imagine how the president's daughter was reacting right now.

On the other side of the glass, David was more than concerned. He was terrified, in spite of all his efforts not to show it.

The former-president's brainwave activity had spiked dramatically - almost off the charts - in that moment he'd cried out. David had immediately ordered Saunders to calm him by any means necessary. He was just glad that she didn't need to apply any sedative - there was no telling what effect drugs might have on this procedure. Clearly the telepathic link Whitmore possessed in his mind was still very potent.

This was also indicated by a much more disturbing side-effect. Surveillance footage of the captive aliens showed them stirring at the moment of Whitmore's outburst - their readings spiked almost in exact parallel. David immediately sent an order for their guards to be put on high alert. Tranquiliser gas was prepared, ready to be pumped into the cells if the captives tried anything. While he was sure they didn't cause that first outburst, David couldn't underestimate what the aliens could be capable of, with their still not-quite-known mental abilities.

He was then pulled out of his thoughts by Isaacs, whose face was tinged with concern.

"Do we still risk it, sir? We can't foresee how extreme any other

reactions may be..."

"We go ahead." David's voice was final. He then addressed Saunders through the mike of his headset.

"Press on with the questions, Irene." He hoped to sound as soft, as human as possible, but this was serious business.

On the other side of the glass, Dr. Saunders gazed guiltily at her troubled charge. She felt awful, putting this man through so much pain after he'd suffered so much already. But he was willing to go every step of the way.

Irene knew she had to be willing to do the same.

"Tell me about these other worlds."

Whitmore swallowed. His voice became airy, distant.

"There were so many..."

"Tell me about some of them. Just a few." Then a new thought came to her. "Were they inhabited too?"

Whitmore's voice rose a little.

"There were battles...battles just like ours..."

"Describe them."

Whitmore continued, regaining his voice in full - as he began to unzip his implanted memories. All the time throughout the session, he kept his eyes closed.

\* \* \*

><p>He seemed to fly through time, with no idea of the timescale of the events he was witnessing. For all he knew, they could be decades, centuries, millennia, even millions of years apart.<p>

Nor could he possibly give any idea of the precise locations of where these events took place. The images were too vague - a star here, a nebula there, a planet in between. He could not tell if the invaders had even begun their endless journey through space in this galaxy, the milky way. The worlds they had visited were so numerous, diverse and scattered throughout space that he struggled to tell them apart.

All he could say with certainty was that everything he witnessed had happened - every world he saw had existed. He was witnessing memories from the invaders' long and savage history, events preserved for posterity not in the pages of books or manuscripts like humans would, but in their vast communal intelligence as gestalt memories.

The memories were preserved so that the swarm could draw on their experience from previous battles, remembering their many victories and massacres. They could all remember the tactics and strategies that lead to those victories, however far back in time - thus keeping their deadly warrior skills sharp as ever.

What he saw was a depressing, terrifying indication of the invaders' power and ruthlessness. They had consumed so many worlds - and encountered other species of vermin that opposed them. The thoughts that surrounded the memories of these other races were the same as those directed at humanity. They had also been in the way of the invaders, obstructed their access to new food. In every instance, the swarm had responded with deadly force.

He first saw a lush world, covered in a blanket of dense jungle - it looked to be the same world that Dr. Wells had described in his visions. This was confirmed when he saw the same creatures the invaders used for their exoskeletons, using their long arms and tentacles to move through the trees, suspending themselves in the jungle canopy, swinging and leaping from branch to branch like monstrous primates.

These beings had no eyes, as was already known from the exoskeletons. They lived beneath a planet-wide jungle thicker than any on Earth; the lower stories beneath the canopy were in near-twilight conditions. The ground floor was in a state of total, perpetual darkness. The inhabitants of this world used a form of echolocation in place of sight, like bats on Earth. Whitmore even saw they had some bioluminescent features, which they lit up when moving through the jungle's dark zone. The invaders, for whatever reason, did not make use of these in their exoskeletons.

The aliens of the jungle world had been primitive when the invaders arrived. They were armed with little more than wooden spears and javelins, which they could multi-wield using their tentacles as well as their arms. They dwelt in what looked to be villages, towns of tree-houses, gathered in clans or tribes. By all rights, they should have been an easy conquest - as easy as the natives of the Bahamas had been for Christopher Columbus.

Nevertheless, they had put up a fight - the invaders could not use their fire beams for fear of destroying the resources this world bore. Though they had used their smaller attacker craft, they were forced to use ground forces - the latter were frequently ambushed in the dense jungle.

Whitmore saw visions of the smaller invaders taking cover as spears rained down on them from the natives in the trees, desperately fighting back with their own weapons and psychic powers, or using what looked to be drones of some sort. He saw with satisfaction that the invaders frequently suffered casualties, dying on the poisoned tips of the native spears, or crushed hand-to-hand by the stronger natives.

The natives waged a long guerrilla war, fighting relentlessly. Whitmore could empathise - they had been fighting for their survival of their people and their world, just as humanity had. But it was all for naught; in the end, the superior technology, sheer determination and ruthlessness of the invaders prevailed. Whitmore saw the native villages burning, whole groups of warriors shot down in cold blood, either by the invaders or their automated minions.

This world was apparently one of the first to be conquered. Unusually, the swarm acknowledged the fighting prowess of the natives and found a purpose for them other than annihilation. It was then that the greatest gain of this past conquest came to pass - a

horrific conclusion that took place before his eyes.

As the planet was exploited, with the invaders' colonies fully established on the surface and the jungle slowly giving way to ruined wasteland, Whitmore saw hundreds, thousands of the native beings herded like cattle, coerced by robotic overseers and imprisoned in camps surrounded by crackling energy fields. They were kept in overcrowded conditions, and though the invaders provided them with food it was no more than humans would provide to livestock.

Perhaps the natives had thought they were only destined for a life of grim slavery, that their race would survive in spite of everything, even as lowly subjects of their new masters from the sky. They could never have imagined the darker purpose behind their enslavement.

The natives were gathered in groups, herded into what looked to be high-tech processing facilities. There they were slaughtered - their bodies gutted, filleted and modified for use. The invaders tried on their new bio-suits, experimenting with the exoskeleton until the design was perfected.

From that point on, the natives of the jungle-world became the invaders' livestock - cloned, bred and reared aboard their giant ships like cattle. The invaders left their world behind, another airless rock stripped bare.

\* \* \*

><p>David listened as Whitmore continued to slowly describe his implanted memories, his voice steady under the influence of the hypnosis.<p>

So far, he'd confirmed what had been speculated about the aliens' exoskeletons - their chemical make-up and physiology suggested that separate species came from a humid and wet environment, the kind that you would find in a rainforest. According to cranial analysis of the exoskeletons, they had been an intelligent species in their own right - which supported Whitmore's vision, even though their stage of development had been close to prehistoric humans.

Furthermore, the very nature of the memories he was reciting was yet another confirmation that there was little, if any sense of individuality within the invaders' society. Whitmore was clearly not reciting the memories of that one alien pilot. They were shared memories of their whole race, which they experienced as one entity. They were a hive mind, that much was clear.

The intelligence level of each individual alien was a matter of speculation. It was possible that they had different castes, with some existing only as simple drones and others bred to have more complex thought patterns. According to analysis of their bodies, they did artificially bio-engineer themselves for different tasks and settings. This helped them to survive both life in space and a planetary environment once they left their low-gravity, low-oxygen home.

But David was sure that there were no true individuals within the alien swarm - another sign that they could not be reasoned with. That mothership that had come to Earth had effectively been a single massive organism, bent only on consuming any world in its path.

What truly scared David was that, according to Whitmore's memories, they all seemed to feel an overriding sense of hunger - a powerful shared emotion that drove them on. The ESD director had no way of knowing whether this was artificial - that this emotion was engineered to drive them further in battle - or whether their population had reached such a point that they were almost always short of food, especially from constantly travelling through space.

What was clear was that their entire civilisation now existed only to consume all worlds in its path - stripping them of resources and biomass, then moving on and repeating the process, so that the hive could feed itself and grow. They had clearly been doing this for a very long time, and David considered it unlikely they would ever stop.

Right now, he was hearing about those other worlds that had fallen in their path. But had any resisted successfully?

As soon as Whitmore had finished talking about the jungle planet, he made sure to remind Dr. Saunders to ask this question.

\* \* \*

><p>In every battle he saw, the outcome was the same.<p>

He saw another world of red skies, scoured by great rivers which produced immense valleys, bordered by snow-capped mountains. Here the natives had reached a roughly post-medieval state, their civilisation boasting fabulous cities connected by an intricate network of paved roads and canals. Their cities were protected by towering curtain walls, imposing fortresses and even primitive gunpowder weapons.

Like the natives of the jungle world, these beings were far behind Earth in terms of development, contrary to what science fiction often depicted. Yet Whitmore could see in the magnificence of their marble cities and buildings, with their towering spires and domes, along with the beautiful ships that plied their canals, that they had been a people of much potential.

Potential that was now lost forever.

In the images of the conquest of this strange world, he saw the blue-skinned natives - roughly humanoid in form but larger, broader and stronger - firing cannons and throwing black-powder bombs down onto the invaders from their castle walls. The natives wore steel armour that made him think of soldiers in the Thirty Years War of sixteenth century Europe, and fought relentlessly to defend their world. He saw them charge the invaders on the ground head-on with oversized swords, pikes, halberds and pipe-like firearms which looked like overpowered riot guns.

These large beings had put up a fight, but it had not saved them. The invaders used what looked to be earlier versions of their huge city-destroyers to level the native cities and castles - this seemed to be the first time they had used such devastating weapons. Those fortresses that could not be reached were strafed with single-ships or stormed with ground forces.

The outcome was predictable - the planet was stripped bare and the large blue aliens were burned to extinction. Their technology had just simply been too primitive, even more outclassed than humanity's had been. For the invaders, such a battle was like spraying an ant nest.

In every instance, there had been no mercy. The invaders had no care or respect for any other lifeforms at all; Whitmore knew this for certain and saw nothing in any of their memories that said otherwise. He could not sense a shred of remorse about the slaughter of so many species, so many unique civilisations. They only saw food and resources to claim for themselves.

One memory showed him a gas giant, populated by floating life-forms of immense size, beauty and wonder. Some looked like huge living balloons, others like soaring gossamer kites, gliding dragons or sky-whales. Whitmore watched the majestic beasts as they floated and soared colourfully through the alien sky. This was the kind of life speculated about by the likes of Carl Sagan, like something from the pages of a fantasy novel. To see that it really existed - he was almost brought to tears at the sight of it all.

But none of those wonders, none of that beauty, meant anything to the invaders. They simply hunted and slaughtered the great beasts like merciless whalers, harvesting all life on that planet and leaving the great clouds barren and polluted from mass gas mining.

Most of the other alien species Whitmore saw being conquered and slaughtered had been primitive - the invaders probably would not have reached their current level of power if they hadn't devoured a lot of poorly-defended worlds.

Yet there were others who were far more advanced - races with technology decades, centuries, even millennia ahead of Earth's. As he moved further down the swarm's memories, Whitmore saw more of these.

There was one battle he recalled glimpsing during his telepathic contact in the vault. This one actually took place in space, above a world of glistening ice. He also saw several other space battles that took place with what looked to be the same species, above other worlds - which suggested these other former enemies of the swarm had colonised other planets, having achieved faster-than-light travel.

The invaders had been met by great warships in space, vessels that almost looked to be made out of solid crystal. They glistened among the stars like floating diamonds - nothing like the menacing dark hulks the invaders favoured. They seemed to be constantly shining, as if charged with some unknowable power. Whatever form of energy these vessels used, it was also lethal - as the battle memories showed.

The invaders had launched huge flotillas of their city destroyers against these magnificent, mysterious native ships, intending to drown them in superior numbers. But, Whitmore noted with satisfaction, they received more than they bargained for.

From these beautiful ships smote shining beams of deadly energy,

which burned through space at long-range. Whatever powerful, unknowable weapon this was, it succeeded where humanity's most destructive devices had failed. Whitmore saw one beam burn straight through the already weakened shields of a city destroyer, boring a red-hot hole through the frontal control tower and neatly emerging out the other side.

The stricken destroyer shuddered and convulsed, fiery cracks spreading through its hull as the destructive energy burned it inside out before ballooning outwards, blasting the city-sized spacecraft apart from within in a single cataclysmic explosion. When the flash cleared, only scattered fragments of white hot hull and clouds of carbonised ashes remained.

Similar scenes were repeated throughout the attacking fleets, in all these different duels in space, as the defenders fired their brilliant beams of light across the void, holding the lines above their worlds.

But the invaders could always count on superior numbers, as well as their technology. After suffering heavy losses, in each battle enough of the destroyer craft got through to unleash waves of attackers that swarmed out of the giant ships like great clouds of hornets.

These swift little craft - so feared by Earth's pilots during the war of 1996 - literally engulfed the crystal warships like swarms of carnivorous ants devouring a herd of elephants. The outnumbered native starfighters were soon overwhelmed. The shining battleships were repeatedly strafed from all sides until their crystalline forms were left shattered in the vacuum.

Soon enough, they were pushed back to their icy homeworld. Whitmore saw the battles on the surface of that world; witnessed the desperate resistance of the furry, pale-skinned, strong, agile inhabitants. They fought the invaders in the ruined streets of their once-beautiful cities of crystal, ice and stone, fortifying their own homes and fighting building-by-building, room-by-room, an extraterrestrial re-enactment of Stalingrad performed hundreds, thousands, perhaps millions of light years away.

Like that battle, the carnage and destruction had been horrific. The dogged resistance of the natives prolonged their war for survival by many years. The invaders paid a heavy price for every inch of native territory captured.

Yet for all the amazing achievements of this civilisation; all their advanced technology, ships, weapons, war machines and the courage of their warriors, it had been to no avail. Whitmore watched with utter horror and disgust as the beautiful crystal cities literally shattered and melted under the fiery-beams of the city destroyers. The defenders had been fighting in the ruins left behind, which lead to the scenes of incredible bravery he had seen.

No amount of courage, however, could stop the invaders. They made the people of this world pay for their defiance.

Whitmore saw the broken crystal cities, where any captured inhabitants were herded together in large groups, surrounded by armed invaders and their assisting drones, driven into what looked like holding camps. He felt his guts stir - he remembered those pictures

he'd seen from the worst of humanity's history. He knew what was coming.

Once the natives were all together they were set upon by the invaders in their bio-suits, who gunned them down with rapid-fire energy bolts, boiled their minds with psychic power or tore them apart hand-to-hand with their tentacles and claws, showing no mercy even to crying younglings and mothers.

Yet for all their viciousness, the invaders were seldom wasteful. The bodies of those they slaughtered were gathered up and taken into what looked like processing facilities; here they were dissolved in pools of fluid, or sifted and pulped in great machines. The resulting product looked like some form of soup or gruel - the invader's food...

Whitmore almost vomited in disgust at the scenes of utter barbarism. The visions of the invaders' repeated atrocities filled him with rage and revulsion - but he knew that he needed to see this, as this was exactly what would have happened had humanity lost its own battle for survival. It was what could very well happen in the future, when they finally came back.

The invaders overran every bastion they came across with sheer numbers, murdering all in their path. Whitmore saw some refugee fleets of those crystal ships fleeing their doomed world - some of the natives had survived, if not many. Their faster-than-light technology had saved them, unlike others. However, it could not save their world. The swarm had no regard for its sanctity and melted down the immense reserves of ice to feed their water supplies. The once shining world was strip-mined, ruined like every other the invaders descended upon.

It was the same story with all the others.

He saw a desert world populated by an insectoid race, united by a hive mind just like the invaders. Swarms of them flew from underground cities, which on the surface looked like giant termite mounds or ant-hills reinforced with advanced technology. Their warriors swarmed in the air, on both their own wings and in their own fighter-craft, meeting the invaders head on.

The invaders swatted them from the sky, before burning their hives with all the thoroughness of pest control experts.

He saw a world of great oceans and sparse land, where the octopus-like natives lived in vast underwater cities deep under the ocean. The invaders adapted their city destroyers for undersea operations, burning the magnificent underwater metropolises like monstrous submarines.

He saw another world where the inhabitants had fortified their world with armoured artificial rings that surrounded the whole planet. The rings had been fortified with huge long-range orbital guns, keeping the massive ships of the invading swarm at bay.

The invaders had used their countless attackers and boarding craft to overwhelm the rings; which they then destroyed, directing the monstrous wreckage to crash into the continent-sized cities on the surface. Then they conquered and harvested the planet.

So many had stood against this hellish swarm, fought bravely and relentlessly - and they had failed. It was dumb luck in so many ways that Earth survived.

Once more, Whitmore felt the malevolence of the hive mind in his memories.

\_To resist us is destruction. \_

\_Every world we come to, becomes our food. \_

\_None have ever stopped us. \_

\_None shall ever stop us. \_

\_We. Are. DEATH.\_

He felt those thoughts in his mind now, burning like a red hot iron. He clutched his forehead, moaning and screaming with pain.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: Hi guys, a bit of an editorial decision. I decided to split this fic into two parts, just to make it easier for you all to read. Since this numbers over 18,000 words, it's effectively a small novella, anyway. Fell free to review any time! :)\*\*

## 2. Chapter 2

\*\*Mind of the Locusts (II)\*\*

In the observation room, David felt the trickling sweat on his brow, his pulse quickening. Beside him, Patricia could barely watch her father's ordeal; she was being consoled by a nearby aide while her father moaned in pain, thrashing in his chair while Saunders and the medical orderly tried to calm him again.

The president's readings were climbing again, along with those of the captive aliens. They were linked, no question about it. Were they the cause of these spikes? David couldn't discount that possibility.

Eventually, they managed to calm him down to speak again, and he resumed talking. Most of their questions now focused on the nature of the invaders' ships, as well as their society, culture - anything that could be gleaned. David was quick to note that the captives' readings stabilised simultaneously with the president's.

Clearly whatever hive mind these beings possessed was formed from a combination all of their individual consciousnesses, every one of them linked together to form a single psychic mass that coalesced into a single intelligence. In such a communal arrangement, emotions, feelings, thoughts and memories were all shared among every member of the race, through their immense psychic network which transmitted constantly across every mind in the swarm.

The nature of the signal David had uncovered as a cable repairman was based on the same principle - every ship in the fleet was linked and

co-ordinated by it, none were kept out of the loop. That same signal powered all of their ships in unison, each constantly transmitting to the other in a vast web of power, hence the reason why they always flew in large groups; the Roswell attacker had only been powered up and flyable once the other vessels arrived.

Whether that power-signal network was in some way linked to the natural hive mind was still a matter of speculation, but David saw such a theory as being reasonable - after all, the invaders' technology was part-organic. Thomas was already describing something called "the navigator" aboard each of their motherships - an artificial brain-creature or perhaps even an enhanced caste of alien - which served as major conduits in their psychic network and directed each mothership through their constant journey through space while the rest of the aliens slept in stasis.

He also implied these navigators were linked to something greater, perhaps at the very heart of the invader's civilisation - but what this could be remained elusive. David guessed that alien pilot had probably been very selective in terms of how many memories in shot into the president's mind.

Nevertheless, Whitmore had somehow become part of their vast communal mind - at least in a small part of his brain that Dr. Saunders was helping to activate through her hypnosis. That was how he was able to see and describe the memories in such visceral detail. To activate the link, it was decided that the experiment had to take place close to living aliens - which was why Area 51 was chosen as the location for this experiment.

As the ESD research team was finding out, such a procedure was extremely dangerous. But David still wanted answers. Now that his team had a bit more about the invaders, he wanted to take a side-track for a moment and try to find out about the other species they'd encountered.

What they had all heard so far had been fascinating; so many alien civilisations, more than humanity could ever have imagined existed even after 1996. Some of those the invaders previously encountered boasted technology that sounded far in advance of Earth's.

And all of them were now gone. David was beginning to surmise one reason why SETI had such little luck picking up alien radio signals before the invaders arrived. Like the Mongol hordes of Genghis Khan on Earth, the invaders had likely caused a demographic imbalance in the galaxy, leaving behind a vast empty void in their wake.

So far Whitmore had described many of these other alien races in rich detail - but the outlook was bleak so far. Nearly every other battle the invaders had fought had lead to their enemies' extinction.

Was Earth really the only planet in the galaxy to fight for its survival and win? David refused to believe that - the odds in favour of that being the case were as astronomically low as those for the idea that humanity had been the only intelligent species in the universe, even before July 1996.

His own idea had saved the human race - and David knew it to be a feat of dumb luck in so many ways. There were too many things that could have gone wrong. Humanity had been on the verge of destruction

at the hands of a vastly superior opponent, with only so much time given to strike while the virus had worked it's magic.

The final battle on July 4th had been a last-ditch attempt that succeeded against all the odds. If the aliens had come with a larger fleet, they would have had enough time to recover from the virus and launch a counter-attack. David knew they would not make the same mistakes when they returned.

Perhaps humanity would soon join those other doomed races, now lost to history.

He fought to keep those thoughts in the dark corner of his mind. There would still be time to ponder the alien distress signal when this experiment was over.

Right now, he needed to focus on the task at hand. Once more, he addressed Dr Saunders through his headset.

"Is he absolutely sure there were no other races that managed to fight them off? No other battles where they lost, anywhere else?"

He heard the hypnotherapist ask the question. Whitmore had recovered from the mental-spike...somewhat...but his words didn't come out. David heard Thomas mumble heavily, as if he was trying to clear the alien mental activity from his own mind. Saunders repeated the question, but was again met with more incoherent grunting. She looked at the two-way mirror, shrugging in the direction of her superiors.

David was on the verge of giving up. There was always the risk of permanent brain damage, and David was determined not to let that happen. If the readings got any worse, he'd pull the plug. It was increasingly looking that way.

Then Whitmore's voice rose.

"Wait..."

Well, his voice did rise - but it was still croaking from the strain of keeping his mind together.

"I can see..." He gasped out his words. "Others...fighting back...holding...fighting...on so many worlds..."

David's attention immediately perked up. Now they were on to something. Irene caught on as well, not wasting any time.

"Who?" Saunders pushed her advantage. "Who is fighting them off?"

Whitmore rasped out the words, forcing them out of his mouth with immense strain and difficulty - almost as if something was trying to keep them from leaving his throat.

"The...great...enemy..."

And then he resumed.

\* \* \*

><p>He saw more battles in space, just like those with the people of the ice world - only these were larger, bloodier and far more pitched.<p>

Furthermore, this enemy was different.

He saw the invaders' armada - which terrifyingly enough, was made up of what looked to be dozens, maybe hundreds of the same class of mothership which assaulted Earth. At the centre was a much larger vessel, almost the size of a planet. Thousands of city destroyers surrounded the core of the invading fleet, gargantuan drones protecting their queen.

They were advancing on a blue-green world, much like Earth. The only difference was that this world was protected.

Parked in orbit and in clear defensive formation, a great fleet stood as one to oppose the invaders. Whitmore had thought the crystalline warships of the ice world amazing - but these craft blew his mind with their alien beauty and form. These vessels were more than a contrast to the invaders' dark monoliths - if anything, they were the polar opposite.

The armada of gold, silver and bronze spacecraft shone like divine beings in the light of the burning white star at the centre of this system, even more than the crystal ships had done. Their design made them look more like works of art than technology; they were so inhumanly elegant and graceful that Whitmore found his eyes watering at the sight. Their builders clearly viewed technology as art, not cold utility - this applied all the way to their warships. Their triangular prows ended in what looked for all the world like sharpened battering rams.

Their unearthly aesthetic applied to the way they moved, too - swift, precise, with little effort and no margin for error. Their manoeuvring capabilities showed nothing but perfection as they gathered into fighting formation and advanced on the invaders. Some of them - manta-like craft which looked to be the command ships - came close to the standard invading motherships in size, but most were smaller than the ships they confronted. Yet this did not deter them.

The monolithic hiveships closed with their enemy, moving slowly and inexorably toward yet another world. They neatly outnumbered their opponents three to one. Yet this mysterious new enemy did not even flinch - their vessels advanced in turn.

Furthermore, the invaders could sense the feelings of the enemies they faced, through their hive mind. Whitmore recalled what they'd sensed from their previous victims - there had been determination and resistance, but the most common emotion had been fear, and above all terror. The knowledge every race had that they were doomed. The swarm had always taken satisfaction from this, seeing it as proof of their inevitable victory each time.

The great enemy was different. The collective mind of the invaders could only sense a determination stronger than any other they had encountered - a pure, unbending zeal that allowed for no possibility of defeat or retreat. This was not just because the great enemy was

inherently zealous, with inherently greater willpower. Whitmore could feel in the memories of the swarm that their greatest foe possessed strong minds, stronger than any the swarm had encountered before.

Strong enough to resist. Their mental power blazed among their ships like the raging fires of a star, a white hot inferno that could not be put out. It was almost as strong the mental power of the swarm.

The swarm clearly viewed them as a serious threat. To Whitmore's satisfaction, he could feel a twinge of fear in the invaders' minds at the sight of these ships.

Whitmore saw the magnificent yet outnumbered vessels draw closer with the invading craft. The invaders launched their attacker swarms, those clouds of deadly stingrays that had overwhelmed so many enemies.

The newcomers did not flinch. Instead, their largest vessels began charging their weapons. Spheres of shimmering energy appeared at the prows of these ships, growing larger and brighter with every second.

Without warning, they sent these great balls of energy hurtling towards the vast clouds of attackers. Whitmore watched in awe as the spheres burst in the midst of the stingray swarms, dissolving and collapsing in a flash of light.

At first he thought the attackers would be destroyed by the explosion - but what actually happened was even more mind-boggling. Clearly, these newcomers were advanced - perhaps even more so than the invaders.

The spheres of energy collapsed in on themselves, becoming artificial black holes which sucked the swarms of attackers into their gaping maws, compressing and crushing them into a tiny pocket dimension, where they could not possibly survive or escape. Whitmore saw dozens of the destroyers and even a few of the motherships caught in the maelstroms, ripped apart by the immense gravitational forces caused by the sudden appearance of multiple black holes in their midst.

As quickly as the black holes were created, they vanished in flashes of light - as if someone had banished them with the flick of a switch, before they could become uncontrollably dangerous to all sides. The craft they devoured vanished with them, lost forever in artificial pocket universes. The ruins of multiple city destroyers floated away in the vacuum, forming a vast debris field.

Whitmore was awestruck at what he'd just witnessed. Somehow - he would never be able to understand or comprehend this alien science - these new beings knew how to manipulate stellar energy for their own ends. They could probably build artificial stars as well, and were thus able to apply that engineering in war, to devastating effect.

Those black holes had destroyed countless attackers - but the invaders could always count on their numbers. New attacker swarms arrived to take their place, quickly compensating for their losses. Those black hole launchers clearly took time to be ready for firing

again - and the swarm took advantage of this to resume their advance.

But the great enemy did not relent. As the new wave of attackers crossed the void between the two fleets, they were met by vast squadrons of golden fighters, which moved with even greater speed and elegance than the stingrays.

The newcomers' fighters were outnumbered, but they more than made up for this with their advanced technology. Whitmore saw them exchanging laser fire with the invaders, but they also possessed yet another extraordinary weapon.

The golden fighters launched expanding bubbles of energy at their foes, trapping multiple stingray attackers and freezing them in space within a gravitational field. Whitmore was reminded of those Roman gladiators who used nets to trap their enemies before killing them, as the trapped and helpless attackers were destroyed by the dozen with plasma fire.

The pilots of the great enemy were skilled, and their fighters advanced to near-perfection. If human fighters had been helpless against the shielded stingrays, Whitmore didn't want to think about how they would fare against the golden craft. But even these advanced fighters couldn't hold the invaders forever - they were steadily getting shot down and it would only be a matter of time before they were overwhelmed, after taking plentiful attackers down with them.

Yet the great enemy remained focused and steadfast, their resolve not wavering in the slightest. Their larger ships advanced on the destroyers and motherships of the swarm, unleashing volleys of plasma torpedoes and burning beams from long-range. The invaders returned fire with their own deadly green beams. Shields flared, hulls were breached, ships were burned and broken on both sides. The golden fleet suffered losses, yet they stubbornly continued to advance.

They closed distance, and once at close range the newcomers unleashed yet another of their advanced weapons.

The golden cruisers drew close with the destroyers, and from their triangular prows poured huge torrents of flaming purple energy. Whitmore wasn't sure if that was some sort of flammable liquid, an advanced extraterrestrial napalm - or whether the purple fire was pure energy. For all he knew, it could be some combination of the two.

Whatever it was, it was sure as hell deadly. The flaming stuff billowed from the golden ships like dragon fire, burning through the shields of the destroyers and melting their dark hulls; accomplishing what nuclear weapons had failed to do on Earth.

As Whitmore watched, he was almost reminded of Greek Fire, a still unknown substance used by the Byzantine Empire in their naval battles. It was some sort of medieval napalm, with the ability to burn even on water, and had been key to Byzantine control of the Mediterranean. All the other nations of the medieval world had fought to get their hands on it, as a key to military dominance.

Perhaps this substance, whatever it was, was prized the same way. It clearly gave these newcomers an edge in this fight.

The purple fire poured forth, engulfing anything in its path. Those destroyers that were not reduced to burning, molten hulks floating dead in space had their weakened hulls rammed through by the sharp rams on those golden prows, taking them out of the fight permanently. Some of the shining ships were destroyed as they rammed their enemies - for some it was a suicidal last charge after suffering fatal damage. These beings clearly didn't believe in dying in failure.

Other ships engaged the destroyers with broadsides of torpedoes and laser fire, suffering losses but persisting until the ships of the swarm fell. The great enemy was driven by an immense zeal, a near-fanatical devotion that ignored all adversity. It was as if fear was a completely foreign concept to them - Whitmore saw they were completely fatalistic in battle. That was what made them such dangerous opposition to the invaders.

The newcomers took out many of the destroyers, breaching the line. Whitmore saw they had also neutralised the attackers swarms from these destroyers, and the remaining golden fighter squadrons rejoined the fleet as they advanced through the breach in the invaders' line.

Now they had to face the great motherships - and they were another matter. Once the line of destroyers was breached, the newcomers faced them dead on. The motherships unleashed more swarms of attackers. The newcomers in turn once more unleashed their black hole launchers, devouring and erasing those swarms from space and tearing several of the motherships apart.

Enough motherships survived to release more attackers, but Whitmore saw the intention of the great enemy's black hole attack - they had punched a hole straight towards the main mothership, that planet-sized monstrosity that dwarfed the hiveship that had assaulted Earth. He could feel in the invaders' memory that this ship contained something vital - someone or something of supreme importance.

It could not be allowed to fall.

The new swarms of attackers tried to fill the hole with their collective zeal, but were taken by surprise as more golden ships appeared in the midst of their motherships with a flash of blue energy. Some form of FTL jump or teleport had allowed them to arrive in their enemy's midst, and soon purple fire and shining torpedoes smote towards the motherships.

The great enemy's reinforcements would not last long against the giant motherships and their countless swarms - but Whitmore saw that they were only meant to last as long as they were needed to. They were just a distraction, enough to allow the main force to push on to the central hiveship.

Swarms of attackers broke off to face this new threat, distracted from their giant charge at the centre of the invading fleet. The newcomers pushed their advantage.

With their great ships and remaining fighters, the great enemy

ploughed through the remaining screen of attackers guarding the central ship. Whitmore briefly noted that these alien attackers were different in design from the ones he had fought on Earth. Perhaps they belonged to some form of elite guard, charged with protecting whatever was inside the main hiveship.

The crux of his attention, however, was drawn to that central ship, that gargantuan vessel at the heart of the invading hive fleet. This ship, had it been present at Earth, would have spanned the Atlantic Ocean. Had such a ship arrived in 1996, Whitmore was certain the human race would not have survived.

By this point, the golden fleet was heavily depleted - only three of the great manta ships remained, along with their escorting cruisers and other smaller vessels. But still they pushed on, even as they continued to take losses.

Once they got close enough to the main invading ship, the manta-shaped planetoid ships unleashed hordes of dart-like craft the size of buildings, which shot out towards the great dark ship like missiles. The lasers of the central mothership swatted many of these away, but most of the defensive systems were distracted by the golden fighters and cruisers.

The surviving darts penetrated the hull of the mothership like mosquitoes, before opening like gold and silver flowers, securing themselves with elegant clamps at their tails.

\_Boarding craft\_, Whitmore realised.

His vision then shifted to multiple battles with similar ships above other worlds, then to air battles with those same golden fighters in the atmosphere. Whitmore didn't know if the battle he had first seen was part of a greater campaign, with simultaneous battles spanning multiple worlds and systems which he was now witnessing, or whether these other battles were separate, each from a completely different point in time.

What was clear from the disparate visions was that this particular race had been a persistent adversary of the invaders for quite some time.

He also saw ground battles, hordes of the bio-suited invaders swarming through alien cities like warrior ants as their numbers were thinned by energy projectiles which burst open with that same deadly purple fire. And just up ahead, shimmers of golden figures moving at an impossible speed, slaughtering the invaders hand-to-hand in a deadly dance, cutting them down left and right...

\_But what about the first battle\_, he heard Saunders say. \_That huge ship - you said it was boarded?\_

Whitmore felt his implanted memories shift back to that battle. It felt painful - as if something didn't want him to see what took place there.

That ship...something was on that ship, something the invaders wanted to keep alive. He could see the interior of that great ship now, that same green-tinged, misted interior Hiller and Levinson had described inside the mothership at Earth.

There was a battle, raging inside that ship. Swarms of the invaders rushed at the great enemy who had dared to trespass this sacred place. The zeal of both sides was unfathomable as they tore into each other. The invaders, swarming their enemy relentlessly. The great enemy, outnumbered but undaunted as they fought on.

From the invaders' perspective, Whitmore struggled to see the mysterious beings they faced. For one thing, these beings moved so fast and with such deadly precision that they seemed almost like shimmers and shadows in the distance. Sometimes these shimmers would disappear into silver-blue flashes of light, then suddenly reappear in a completely different place with another flash. Some form of teleport, perhaps? These beings seemed to possess all forms of strange tech.

There was definitely teleportation involved here; Whitmore could see the tips of the huge, pointed boarding craft jutting through the titanic bulkheads of the hiveship. Larger flashes appeared below them; perhaps indicating whole armies of the elusive enemy appearing within milliseconds. It seemed the great darts were not conventional boarding craft at all, but teleport relays, connecting to the huge golden ships of the great enemy's fleet.

It was much harder to see your enemy in infantry combat than it was in a naval or air battle, and Whitmore could only see memories that captured the enemy beings from a distance - perhaps the aliens didn't want him to see memories that captured them in more detail. The beings didn't allow the swarm to get too close, either - he saw those same spherical energy fields loaded with the purple fire landing and bursting open into the invaders' midst, keeping them at bay.

Yet the great enemy had much more than this. Whitmore thought he could see bolts of energy, flashes of lightning erupting from their lines into the masses of rushing invaders. He also saw waves of the swarm inexplicably thrown back, scores of the invaders sent flying as if by some invisible hand. At first he thought this might be some new technology - but then something even more inexplicable happened.

Storms of that same crackling energy erupted in the midst of the charging swarm, engulfing and striking down hundreds. From the lines of the great enemy, Whitmore though he could see the energy that powered these storms flowing from shining figures in the distance, as if they were sorcerers casting spells.

\_That had to be impossible...\_

Impossible or not, the invaders saw it - and Whitmore could tell they feared it. Now he was beginning to understand why these mysterious beings were considered the great enemy to them.

\_But what was on that ship?\_

Saunders' voice shook him from his thoughts. He tried to sift through the memory, to discover what it was the invaders had been fighting to defend that day.

He never got the chance.

\* \* \*

><p>Within their featureless cells, they stirred.<p>

They could all sense it. The presence of a primitive mind in the thoughts of their community. A mind that did not belong.

A mind that was seeing things it shouldn't. Seeking secrets that must be protected.

They had felt such strange readings in their sea of thoughts for the past few hours - but now they had pinpointed the source, as the readings increased in intensity.

The natives were prying. They had to be stopped. If they delved further, they would find out about her existence. She could not be exposed, not before she arrived to bring vengeance to this primitive world.

More was at risk. They could now sense the thoughts, the exact memories that the native mind was sifting through.

The Great Enemy. If the natives found out about them...If they became involved...

This could not be allowed.

They focused their minds as one, joining together and strengthening their power, bringing their thoughts to bear on the mind that did not belong.

They struck as one.

\* \* \*

><p>The pain struck Whitmore, greater than any other pain he'd felt since the initial mind-rape.<p>

His forehead felt as if it was being struck repeatedly with a crowbar. His ears rang with pure energy, feeling as if steel needles were being slowly pushed through them, straight through the eardrums, all the way through his skull and into his fragile, unprotected brain.

This time he was thrown out of the chair, straight onto the cold, hard floor. The monitor wires he was hooked up to were torn from their sockets, flailing about on the floor as they fell with him. The monitor machine was nearly toppled over. The neatly placed jug and glasses of water were thrown off the table, spilling their contents and shattering all over the floor.

Dr. Saunders threw herself back, shouting for intervention and medical aid as the sole attendant struggled to calm the president as he screamed on the floor in unbearable agony, making sounds she never thought a human could make, and never hoped to hear again.

On the other side of the two-way, Patricia was screaming in terror, the secret service agents trying in vain to calm her. David immediately saw from the monitors that the aliens had collectively stirred - the readings showed increased activity on their

part.

\_"GAS THEM, RIGHT NOW!"\_ He screamed into the ears of Dr Isaacs, who immediately sent the order to security.

The tranquilising gas was pumped into the alien holding cells without delay. Its effects could be clearly seen on the security cameras; a thick white mist that sent them toppling and tumbling to the deck, straight into a deep sleep.

As they did so, Whitmore calmed. David wiped a mop of sweat from his brow, as he steadied his voice to speak again.

"Pull the plug. I'm not risking him any further. Now that they're all sleeping, he won't be able to open the link with the hive-mind again."

He then pulled off the headset and sat down, his chest heaving. Isaacs was now in the interrogation room, stabilising the former president with the newly arrived medical team.

Beside him, Patricia was in tears, with an aide consoling her as best she could.

Whitmore would live. He just barely registered the positive medical evaluation given by Isaacs on the intercom. But David's mind was stirring with everything he'd just seen and heard.

The aliens didn't want anyone knowing the rest of that memory - that much was certain, as obvious as their intervention in this experiment. There was something they wanted to keep a secret. Whether that something was whoever or whatever was on that huge ship Whitmore had talked about, or the outcome of that particular battle, he couldn't say for certain. Perhaps the mothership navigators were linked to whatever was aboard the central vessel.

However, David's main thoughts were focused on that powerful, mysterious race that the memory had described. Armed with power and technology that sounded almost god-like in capability and even more advanced than the invaders themselves, perhaps one of the few to repel their invasions. The aliens clearly remembered them well - and from what Thomas had described in his implanted memories, they were scared of them.

David felt sick as he considered another thought - maybe we should be scared too.

He guessed that another reason the aliens had been quick to shut down the hypnosis experiment was because they didn't want humans knowing too much about this other race - which meant that this 'great enemy' was likely still out there.

David didn't even want to think what the intentions of this other race might be if they discovered Earth - and he certainly didn't want to imagine what humanity's odds of survival would be then. They had barely survived an invasion from one advanced alien race. These others, judging from Whitmore's vivid descriptions, sounded even more advanced - and thus even more dangerous.

\_They might just already know about us.\_

David felt his blood run cold at that thought. There was something he remembered, something that - he was realising to his horror - might just be linked to this.

He would have to review it, once this all settled down.

\* \* \*

><p>Many hours passed. The baking sun had long set over the Nevada mountains outside, leaving the vast deserts of Groom Lake cold and bathed in the light of the moon and the multitudes of stars in the beautiful skies above.<p>

The sky was truly lit up that night, a brilliant spectacle of the many lights in the great ocean of space. Shooting stars blinked here and there, in a sporadic meteor shower, adding to the amazing view. Perhaps it was all in recognition of the events that had taken place beneath the sands, an omen of what had been revealed, or maybe of what was still yet to come.

Whitmore was sent to Area 51's infirmary, Patricia by his side. Dr. Saunders attended, ready to bring his mental state back into stability. Isaacs left Dr. Matthews, the best MD at Area 51 besides himself, to bring the ex-POTUS to full health, having done the best he could.

Isaacs was required to attend a meeting David had called in the main conference room. It was roughly 8:30 p.m. by the time the meeting began - attending to the stricken POTUS had taken up most of his time, and Director Levinson made sure that full transcripts of the hypnosis were printed and sent to every attendee at this conference.

Clearly, this was an important meeting.

Sure enough, he was joined by ESD's other senior scientists, who filed in around the solid oak table, taking their seats in silence. They had all heard of what had taken place during the Whitmore hypnosis. All of them knew this meeting would be serious business.

David had summoned them all to Area 51 in advance of Whitmore's arrival, anticipating the findings of the hypnosis experiment and hoping to discuss the results as soon as possible. He took his seat at the head of the table, after greeting all of the scientists in turn.

They all had paper copies of the hypnosis transcript in front of them. David had insisted they all read them before this meeting began, particularly the passages towards the end.

That was the topic he was most keen to address first.

"We obviously have to allow for the fact that these memories may be vague, that there may be room for error due to former-president Whitmore's mental condition. Hypnosis is always unpredictable." He kept his voice calm as he could - quite a feat in light of what had taken place earlier in the day. "But that doesn't mean we shouldn't

take its results seriously. I wouldn't have given the go for this experiment if I thought that way." He looked at them all seriously. "And neither would you."

They all took a moment to think on that. David was pleased to see that Dr. Simm was next to speak, his northern English accent echoing off the acoustic walls.

"I take it you'll want to go through all the archives again, sir? You'll want me to find more, I'm guessing."

David smiled. Simm was astute, observant - exactly as his profile said, the reason why Director Levinson had recruited him from the campus of Bristol University. He was the exact kind of man suited to the task of overseeing the alien archive project - which was the reason for his attendance. David had a feeling that whatever the hypnosis uncovered, it would lead back to the historical record of their visits to Earth.

And perhaps, the visits of others.

"Pretty much, Rob." David liked to be informal as he could, even as the director of Earth's first line of defence against alien invasion. "As you know I hired you to deal with records of every confirmed alien visitation, sighting or incident we know about, from every archive compiled across the world. We've compiled it all onto computer databases, thanks to you. I'm especially grateful for that; I'd have hated dealing with piles of folders and filing cabinets for the rest of my life."

Everyone in the room chuckled at the joke.

"Thanks to you, we've got our hands on all remaining CIA, NSA, FBI and military records - at least the ones that asshole Nimziki didn't shred to keep all of this 'plausibly deniable'. Who knows what else he was keeping under his robes. If he did know anything else, he took it with him."

Albert Nimziki had suffered a heart attack back in 2000, dying in comfortable retirement in Connecticut. From what David heard he was mostly friendless when he passed away; after the war he had been publicly exposed to the world as the man who had kept the existence of the aliens secret. President Whitmore had to fight off a few accusations from media conspiracy theorists about foul play in the last year of his presidency, following news of his death.

In spite of his sacking and public disgrace, Nimziki still had many well-entrenched disciples in the intelligence community - most of them in high places - who ensured he was not interrogated. These people still insisted on greater secrecy, frequently clashing with the ESD over its more open policy.

David continued, following a brief pause.

"Plus, in the past five years, we've managed to look at other government records from around the world, which before all this started we would never have had any hope of getting a hold of. The Russians have revealed their own UFO records, dating all the way back through the Soviet era. The Chinese have followed suit. We're still going through all that new material, but from everything we've dug

up, we know the aliens were coming to this planet for quite some time before..."

One of the scientists interrupted David with a cough. Dr. Hurst, twenty years his senior and one of the more sceptical voices among his subordinates.

"With respect, director Levinson, as you said, we already know they were coming here before '96. We knew that well before it happened, well before we got hold of all these new records. Ever since Roswell, all those confirmed sightings; not to mention Dr. Okun's little misadventure in Mexico back in the '70s. What else would we find out from sifting through more archives?"

"Good question Sid." David didn't mind being questioned or interrupted - it allowed discussion and debate to flow. That was where he was at his best. "First of all, we might find some things about the aliens and their tech that we didn't know before. And I didn't just mean before '96 - from the KGB records the Russians shared with us, we know now they were coming here even before Roswell. Second of all..."

He paused for effect, making sure he had the undivided attention of everyone in that room. It was only when he did that he spoke again.

"...I don't just mean the aliens we know of."

The cabal of scientists looked at each other, visibly confused. David smiled, knowing he had the upper hand in the discussion.

"We've got hundreds of sightings in those archives, thousands of testimonies dating back decades. There have been theories of aliens visiting us in ancient times. The majority of it is bunk, I will grant you; we've gone great lengths to discover which is bunk and what isn't. Dr. Simm has set out to let the public know exactly which past UFO reports are true and which aren't. But maybe we've been going about it the wrong way."

He leaned forward across the table, meeting the eyes of all before him.

"Maybe we've only been looking for proof of the one species we've met so far. Maybe we've only tried to match each report to them, not allowing for the possibility that others might have visited us. Or at least, one other race."

The others stirred, knowing what he was getting at. Dr Sidney Hurst eventually managed to find his voice to reply.

"You mean...you want to revive the 'second species' hypothesis?"

David nodded. The said hypothesis arose from the fact that all the UFO reports compiled across the world did not just describe one species. The invaders had been the most prominent of course, but others were described by witnesses. Thus, ESD discussions had come up with a hypothesis that other alien races had visited Earth in the past and were already aware of humanity's existence. However, this theory had little in the way of hard proof.

Dr. Hurst was quick to point this out.

"With respect sir, those reports are just eyewitness testimony. Like you said, so much of it is bunk - we've only confirmed the reports we know to feature the invaders as true. The other reports describe all sorts of things. We've got eyewitness accounts of the Virgin Mary, for Christ's sake; how do we know which accounts are real and which aren't?"

David smiled. He expected this.

"Well, the first thing I'd suggest is look for the golden ships."

Hurst looked incredulous.

"Sir, you're not seriously suggesting we rely solely on one man's mental vision..."

"It's the best we've got," David continued, holding up a hand for defence, "you don't have to believe everything that emerged today. But if there is another race out there with the power to wipe us out, I want to know if there is even the smallest chance they've visited us. What you read in that transcript might sound unbelievable. But remember that the existence of their hive mind has been scientifically proven - the readings in the report confirm that Thomas Whitmore is somehow linked to it. Debate it all you want, but that mental link exists."

He emphasised the last word, allowing for a minute to pass before he spoke.

"We'll use every resource we have; to that end I'll be ordering our astronomical division to increase their surveillance, both radio and optical. The extra-solar planet finder, which as you all know is due to launch in two years, will be joining them. If there are any planets out there which can support alien civilisations, we'll want to know about them. There might be a chance it can find any trace of them out there."

He then placed his hand on his copy of the transcript.

"All we know about this other species so far is in here. That's what we've got and that's all we have to act on at this point. We know they've been fighting each other - but for all we know these could be rivals, fighting for control of the resources of different planets. I'd like to believe the enemy of our enemy is our friend - but history shows us that isn't always true."

Hurst spoke again.

"Assuming this supposed other species survived, sir. According to the transcript, the president didn't see the rest of the memory."

"It's all we've got to work with. From what he described, I'd say they had a better chance of surviving than we will when we have to face the next wave."

The room fell silent once more. Everyone present knew the

implications of the alien distress signal, discovered by military intelligence after the mothership exploded. David let the moment hang for a minute or two.

"We've heard some extraordinary testimony today. To that effect, I'm approving the research project I've further outlined in hard copy, attached to each transcript. Project: SECOND MUSKETEER is a go."

Each scientist made sure to read the plan for this research project, which would hunt for hard evidence of this supposed second species. Not only would it included archive and field research, but astronomical observations and surveys too.

Simm was the last to speak.

"Am I right in assuming this project is top secret, sir?"

David sighed. He hated secrecy - it was the main reason why the world had been so unprepared for what happened. But there was some wisdom in ensuring that the public was not lead into further panic, after such a traumatic just five previous.

"Correct. We don't even know if this species has visited us yet - no need to cry wolf right now. Any findings for this project are to remain strictly classified - outside of this room and all relevant personnel only the main ESD committee at the UN, top serving heads of state and intelligence chiefs are obliged to know about it."

The next ten minutes were spent discussing the particulars of the project, whether any physical evidence could be found in the form of radio signals or crash sites, along with which eyewitness accounts and testimonies to immediately ignore.

Satisfied everyone knew what to do, David called the meeting to an end.

\* \* \*

><p>He stayed behind afterward, leaning back in his chair and pondering on the day's events. Being in charge of Earth's defence was a truly tough job, one that got tougher day by day.<p>

He wasn't sure what to make of the idea of other alien civilisations out there. The hopeful part of him wanted to believe there was a chance humanity might find some powerful allies in the galaxy, races that didn't like the invaders any more than Earth did, who would help this planet in its fight against the coming storm.

But everything David had seen in the July of '96 jaded that view. If one alien race was inherently hostile, then others could be too.

Humans had been little more than ants to the invaders - they had been thousands of years ahead in terms of technology. He looked over his notes again on the so-called 'great enemy' Whitmore had described. Fast, powerfully armed starships, capable of faster-than-light travel and rapid pin-point jumps. Weapons that could burn through the invaders' shields and boil away their hulls. Unmatched skills in combat. Technology that could create black holes and supernovas at

will.

Then he looked at this final note: \_superior mental/psionic abilities?\_ He remembered hearing the scenes of battle which showed flashes of lightning frying scores of the invaders. The invaders had psychic powers - not only telepathy and shared memories but also the ability to use their minds as weapons. There was no reason to suppose another alien race couldn't have the same abilities and greater - a terrifying prospect for sure.

If \_Homo Sapiens \_had been ants to the invaders, David could only imagine what they would be to these others. Microbes, probably. Amoeba.

Perhaps this particular race simply wasn't interested in Earth or its inhabitants, assuming they were even aware of them. Maybe that was why they hadn't revealed themselves yet like the invaders had. David hoped that to be true - but hoping didn't make it so.

For now, David knew he would have to wait for the results of the investigation.

He eventually decided to go up top, to get some fresh air. Taking the elevator and checking out, he strolled out with his binoculars, into the night air.

He walked away from the Area 51 complex, away from the hangars and double runway - until he reached a secluded spot on a set of hills behind the main building. Whenever he came out here, He made sure he got as far away as he could from the light pollution of the main runway. That was the first rule of stargazing, after all.

He liked having these moments to himself - but it was times like this, when his mind ached with worry, that he wished for his father to be around. Old Julius was still alive and kicking, though he was mostly in steadily rebuilding New York these days.

However much the old codger nagged, David always valued their conversations. It helped take his mind off...other things.

David spied the craters of the full moon for ten minutes or so through the binocular lenses, before turning his naked eyes to the vast globe of stars and nebulae above him.

Before 1996, he would have found them beautiful, a source of inspiration. Now, they contained only danger and foreboding - along with the constant reminder that \_they \_were out there, that \_they \_were coming, that \_they \_would one day return to finish what they'd started here on Earth.

When they came - not if, \_when\_ - Director David Levinson would have to make sure everything was ready. He was far from certain he could do this.

Now, there was even more uncertainty. Now, David knew there were others out there - others who also possessed the power to wipe out the human race if they wanted to.

For the first time, the sky seemed darker than it had in any of the previous five years.

David turned away, shaking his head. There was work to be done - worrying about the danger wouldn't make it go away, nor would it contain it. Only his work had the slimmest chance of doing so, of meeting the horror that lay among the stars.

He just hoped it would be enough.

**\*\*A/N:** For those of you expecting updates on my other stories, I apologise - my assignments for my Master's are taking up a lot of time right now.**\*\***

**\*\*Still,** I've been on an ID4 high following the announcement of Resurgence. ID4 was one of my favourite films during my childhood, and I've had fanfic ideas surrounding it for some time. The sequel trailers spurred me on - and this is the result. I just had to get it all out.**\*\***

**\*\*I'll** see if anything else comes out of this long-short - I'll probably wait until after Resurgence comes out. Hope you enjoyed this so far! :)**\*\***

End  
file.